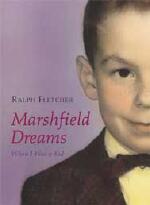
A Suggestion for Narrative/Memoir Lessons   
Teaching students to write about their own memories? Here's a mentor text suggestion:

**A Review of two Books & an Activity Suggestion:**

[[](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/080507242X?ie=UTF8&tag=writi-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=080507242X)](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/080507242X?ie=UTF8&tag=writi-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=080507242X)When I read Marshfield Dreams this summer, based on [WritingFix's] excellent recommendation, I was struck by how many of the book's shorter chapters reminded me of other mentor texts I have on my classroom bookshelf. For example, there's a cute little chapter called "Farmed Out," (page 51-53) which explains how Ralph and his brothers and sisters were sent to live with relatives whenever a new baby was born in his childhood home. Ralph had a big family, so this happened a lot. In just a few words, Ralph vividly captures specific and wonderful memories that he associated with his visits to his Uncle Paul and Aunt Louise's home in Rhode Island on these occasions. There is a wonderful paragraph of memory snapshots that move us through memorable mornings on these visits to memorable evenings. When Ralph talks about *visiting* relatives, he is using *visiting* as a verb.

This chapter reminded me of another favorite book about *visiting* relatives, but in Cynthia Rylant's The Relatives Came, *visiting* is used as an adjective. This is an award-winning book that shares the story of relatives that come and stay with the author (instead of the other way around, as it happens in Marshfield Dreams). The story focuses on the physical and emotional closeness that families experience during visits. It never fails to remind my students of times when they had interesting experiences during family visits at their homes.

I had my students compare/contrast the chapter from Fletcher and the picture book by Rylant. I asked them to focus on the writing style more than the stories. We generated a list of skills we saw both the authors use, and a list of unique skills we saw each writer impress us with.

Then I wrote the words *Visiting Relatives* on my prompt board and tell students they will be writing a short narrative on this topic. They could use the word *visiting* as either an adjective or verb and they wrote a true story using just those two words as their prompt.

Before drafting and again before revising, my students visited the list of skills we had made when comparing the two texts. My struggling writers all had to choose one skill they would use in their writing, my middle writers all had to choose two, and my strongest writers all had to choose three.

When responding to each other's drafts, they had to guess which skill(s) they thought the writer had tried to demonstrate in the writing.

I was amazed at how thoughtful the writing as from all of my students when I gave them the *visiting relatives* prompt!